

Description of the Split Panel Test of the Current Population Survey Annual Social and Economic Supplement (CPS ASEC) Income Redesign

The 2014 CPS ASEC utilized a probability split panel design to test a new redesigned set of income questions. The Census Bureau conducted an initial nationwide test of a redesigned set of income questions by telephone in March 2013.¹ Based on the results of that initial test, a second, more comprehensive test was conducted in 2014. The second test was administered to three-eighths of the total 2014 ASEC production sample.² There were approximately 98,000 addresses in the 2014 CPS ASEC sample; a subsample of about 30,000 addresses were randomly assigned to be eligible to receive the redesigned income questions, the remaining sample (approximately 68,000 addresses) were eligible to receive the set of ASEC income questions that have been in use since 1994, referred to here as the traditional income questions.³ The source of data for the *Income and Poverty in the United States: 2013* report are the portion of the sample that received the traditional income questions.

The income questions were redesigned with the goals of improving income reporting, increasing response rates, reducing reporting errors by taking better advantage of an automated questionnaire environment, and updating questions on retirement income

¹ For more details of the March 2013 content test and more specific details on all the changes to the ASEC redesigned income questions see, Semega and Welniak, “Evaluating the 2013 CPS ASEC Income Redesign Content Test,” presented at the November 2013 meetings of the Federal Committee on Statistical Methodology, <www.census.gov/hhes/www/income/publications/Evaluating%20the%202013%20CPS%20ASEC%20Income%20Redesign%20Content%20Test.pdf>

² All 2014 ASEC sample addresses were eligible to receive a new set of health insurance questions.

³ Each address in sample was assigned a random number to determine if the address would receive the traditional or redesigned ASEC questionnaire. One caveat is that all month-in-sample-one addresses received the traditional ASEC. Census field representatives did not know in advance if the household they were interviewing would receive the traditional or redesigned income questions until they began the interview. All CPS ASEC interviewers were trained to conduct both sets of questions.

and the income generated from retirement accounts and all other assets. The following were components of the redesign instrument:

- Tailor the order of income questions to match those sources most likely received by respondents given certain known characteristics of the respondent focusing on households with a householder aged 62 and older, lower income households, and a default for all other household types.
- Use a dual-pass identifying all sources of income received first and then ask amounts for those sources the respondent indicated receiving.
- Use income ranges as a follow-up for “don’t know” or “refused” income amount questions.
- Remove the family income screener for determining which households to ask low-income sources (such as Temporary Assistance for Needy Families [TANF]).
- Change the disability questions to eliminate confusion between disability from Social Security and SSI.
- Collect lump sum back-payments for disability benefits.
- Use a new strategy to collect property income by asking separately about income from retirement accounts and other assets.
- Collect the value of assets that generate income if the respondent is unsure of the income generated.
- Ask about retirement account withdrawals and distributions.

The Census Bureau is currently analyzing the results of the split panel test. It is the Census Bureau’s intent to use a single questionnaire administered to the full sample in 2015. The results of our analysis will determine the makeup of that questionnaire – redesign or traditional. Census will release the results of this analysis along with a research file in 2015.